

posed by these witnesses, questions that have unfortunately, been asked before, but that have not been answered, not by the administration, and not by MSHA. As Amber said:

I understand that nothing that I say today or nothing that happens in the future is going to bring my Dad back. But my Uncle Johnny, my Uncle Mike, my cousin Rocky, as well as every other miner that is underground and every other son who's getting ready to go into the coal mines—because that's where the jobs are in West Virginia and maybe some of these other states—we can prevent their families from going through this.

We owe it to Amber and every other American who has lost a loved one in a mining accident to learn what more we can do to make mines safer. And then, just as Amber says, we must take action to prevent more families from going through the hell that she has had to go through.

CELEBRATING THE INDEPENDENCE OF TEXAS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. DAVIS of Kentucky). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. MCCAUL) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCCAUL of Texas. Mr. Speaker, on March 2, 1839, the Republic of Texas declared its independence on the banks of the Brazos River, which eventually gave rise to the great Lone Star State. Tomorrow, in honor of this historic event in Texas and American history, we will celebrate Texas Independence Day.

I am proud to say that part of this great story of freedom, independence and democracy took place in the 10th Congressional District of Texas, the district I am proud to say I represent.

Texas Independence Day marks a time when today's Texans honor and celebrate the work and sacrifice of Texans many generations ago, people who heroically claimed their freedom from Mexico and sought out their own destiny governed by the laws of a true democracy, a constitution written by the people and the colors of their country's flag waving over what would become the free and independent Republic of Texas.

Between 1820 and 1836, the Mexican Government offered Americans the opportunity to live and work in Texas under Mexican rule, but they grew disheartened by the tyranny and depression. In the Steven F. Austin Colony, which was the first colony, Texans first established a provisional government in 1835 with the intention of writing a declaration of independence soon after. However, the Mexican army was intent on destroying any move toward Texas independence, and the Consultation of 1835, as it was known, adjourned without the organization needed to continue the cause for freedom.

Less than a year later, many of the same delegates present at the Consultation of 1835 arrived along the banks of the Brazos River in the town of Washington, just north of the Austin Colony, which is now Austin County.

By the spring of 1836, the encroachments on Texans' basic freedoms had reached a flash point. On March 1, 1836, 59 delegates hailing from all corners of Texas arrived at the village of Washington along the Brazos River to decide the principles they would invoke in claiming their freedom from Mexico.

There, these brave men drafted the language that would declare their independence from Mexico, and they did so knowing full well that they may have to pay the ultimate price for freedom. As the delegates along the Brazos River wrote the Texas declaration of independence, patriots like Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and William Travis fought and died for Texas freedom at the Alamo.

After successfully gaining independence from Mexico, Republic of Texas President Sam Houston in 1842 moved the Republic's capital to the birthplace of Texas, Washington on the Brazos River. Three years later, by an act of the United States Congress, Texas was made part of the American Union and became the 28th State of the United States of America.

There can be no argument about the Lone Star State's significant contributions to American history, and we must remember the actions and the sacrifices of those who made Texas independence a reality.

Washington on the Brazos represents an historic event that took place long ago, but tonight we remember Washington on the Brazos as the place where the proud Republic of Texas was born with the desire for freedom and an undying spirit of democracy.

Today, we see that same spirit and determination for freedom and democracy in our fighting men and women overseas and in the people and countries they have liberated. As with the first Texans, those people in distant lands know what it means to be liberated from tyranny and drink from the cup of freedom. They, too, will succeed and flourish in a free and democratic society.

PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH FOR VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. WOOLSEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I have spoken many times from this podium, over 130 times actually, about the moral imperative of bringing our troops home from Iraq. With sectarian strife reaching a bloody, violent high in Iraq last week, it is clear that our military presence is doing more harm than good. But for many of our Iraq veterans, even an immediate end to the occupation would be too late to spare them a possible lifetime of physical and psychological damage.

Much is made, and with good reason, of the physical wounds suffered in combat, but even those who return home physically unharmed often face terri-

fying demons. Even the toughest, bravest and best trained soldiers are not immune to devastating trauma, the result of daily exposure to danger and unspeakable carnage. These demons must be addressed, and they must be addressed medically in order for many soldiers to return to normal, productive lives.

But the Washington Post reports today that not enough veterans are getting the mental health care they need. One-third of returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans are seeking mental health services, and the great majority of those who are diagnosed with psychiatric problems are going untreated.

It is a budget problem and it is a diagnostic problem. Given the nature of the war in Iraq, we must adjust the official standards for what constitutes trauma and, thus, what qualifies veterans for subsidized treatment.

Because the combat danger in Iraq is anywhere and everywhere, many, many of our troops are exposed to conditions that lead to mental distress. As one psychiatrist at Walter Reed explained, "There is no front line in Iraq, and everyone in a convoy is a target." Steve Robinson, head of the National Gulf War Research Center, told the Post that there are few sanctuaries in Iraq. "Every place," he said, "is a war zone."

Meanwhile, it seems the Department of Veterans Affairs is poorly equipped to deal with this situation. Today's Washington Post article cites budget constraints and worries that the Department won't be able to handle the huge influx of returning soldiers in need of mental health treatment.

But who caused those budget constraints? Certainly it wasn't our troops in Iraq who foolishly promised that we could fight a quarter-of-a-trillion-dollar war and dole out billions of dollars of tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans. It wasn't our troops who twisted arms to pass this Medicare Part D boondoggle, which is subsidizing the drug companies and the insurance interests while leaving seniors to wrestle with a bewildering bureaucracy.

Is there any reason why we couldn't have anticipated an enormous demand for Iraq-related mental health services? Of course there wasn't. Couldn't we have included enough money into the war supplemental bills this body has passed? Couldn't we have sacrificed other budgetary handouts and goodies, the ones that benefit people who haven't offered a fraction of the sacrifice for their country that our Iraq veterans have?

I guess if you assumed that our troops would be greeted in Iraq as liberators and if you assumed that we would be in and out of Iraq in a flash, you never got the got to the point where you worried about the mental health of returning veterans.

Once again we see the disastrous, tragic consequences of failed planning and poor execution of this war.